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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER HEARS MESSAGE
ON DEMOCRACY, SAYS CSTO BASE IN KYRGYZSTAN WAS A SURPRISE

REF: A. ASTANA 1166

[1](#)B. MOSCOW 2070

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland: 1.4 (B), (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: During a frank conversation with the Ambassador on August 12, Presidential Adviser Kairat Sarybai said he expected that the new State Commission for the OSCE would propose further steps, "since that is part of the commission's mandate," that could be taken on democratization before Kazakhstan assumes the OSCE chairmanship in 2010. Sarybai also averred that Russia's announcement of a new CSTO military base in Kyrgyzstan had blindsided Kazakhstan. When President Nazarbayev demanded an explanation, Russian President Medvedev allegedly replied that this was strictly a bilateral agreement between Russia and Kyrgyzstan, and that Russia would simply use the base to train Kyrgyz troops. END SUMMARY.

TIME FOR SOME MORE STEPS FORWARD ON DEMOCRACY

[1](#)2. (C) During an August 12 meeting with Presidential Foreign Policy Adviser Kairat Sarybai, the Ambassador told him that the trend of events in Kazakhstan is raising some eyebrows in Washington, as well as in Europe. The most high-profile examples drawing attention are the passage of the Internet Law and the trial and conviction of journalist Ramzan Yeserkepov. Kazakhstan is under closer scrutiny and is being held to higher international expectations because of its upcoming 2010 OSCE chairmanship. The Ambassador suggested it would be important to take some concrete steps soon to improve this image -- and reality -- problem. He recommended that the government of Kazakhstan consider initiating action to follow up on the request by Under Secretary of State Burns to Foreign Minister Tazhin during their private one-on-one meeting in Astana on July 10 -- that Kazakhstan take concrete steps toward further fulfillment of its "Madrid commitments," before it takes the OSCE chairmanship on January 1, 2010 (reftel A). Such a concrete step that would be well-received in Washington, Brussels, and Vienna, could be, for example, to decriminalize libel for the mass media. Another valuable step would be to establish by law fully independent election commissions. The Ambassador conceded this latter suggestion might be harder, but argued that President Nazarbayev is strong and broadly supported by Kazakhstan's voters; he can

afford to take such a "radical" step, which would gain him considerable international credit.

13. (C) Sarybai thanked the Ambassador for this "straight talk" and said, "We will consider this closely." He noted that the newly formed State Commission for the OSCE would likely, in fact, as part of its mandate propose next steps that can be taken on democracy. "But," Sarybai cautioned, "I want you to remember, as President Nazarbayev told Under Secretary Burns, that democratization in Kazakhstan is not tied to our OSCE chairmanship; it's an ongoing process that must take into account the political, cultural, and social traditions and conditions of the nation." (NOTE: The new State Commission for the OSCE, announced several days earlier in the press, is an inter-agency body, but does not, we're told, include civil society representatives. We are seeking more details about this commission. END NOTE.)

14. (C) Later in the conversation, Sarybai reminded the Ambassador that President Obama is welcome to visit Kazakhstan at any time, "perhaps a brief visit in conjunction with an Obama visit to a larger country in the region." He added that President Nazarbayev would appreciate a separate bilateral visit to Washington next spring at the time of the Nuclear Security Summit, which he plans to attend. The Ambassador responded frankly that working to achieve either or both would be easier if Kazakhstan would evidence some positive steps as we had just discussed. Sarybai asked, "Are these preconditions?" The Ambassador said, "No, our new administration does not necessarily do 'preconditions.' However, as an enormously experienced diplomat yourself, surely you understand the power of negative image and

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positive perception." Sarybai smiled and said, "Message received."

15. (C) COMMENT: We recall that Sarybai had once told us that letters of protest by international NGOs, along with frank, quiet diplomacy from respected embassies, have the tendency to catch President Nazarbayev's attention. However, he is not likely to back down on the Internet Law and the Yeserkepov case, we are convinced, because both are in one way or another a result of his cosmic feud with his ex-son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev, now exiled in Europe and publishing exposes like "Godfather-in-Law." However, we do hold out hope for Kazakhstan's new State Commission for the OSCE, and are cautiously optimistic that positive steps on democratization might result from it. END COMMENT.

NAZARBAYEV BLINDSIDED ON CSTO BASE IN KYRGYZSTAN?

16. (C) Sarybai had just returned from accompanying President Nazarbayev to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) informal summit in Kyrgyzstan. He commented that the summit was held "without agenda"; and so, little was prepared and even less accomplished (see ref tel B). The real reason for the summit, he speculated, was to toast President Bakiyev's birthday, an old Soviet tradition among leaders.

17. (C) Sarybai said he wanted to pass along a private conversation he had had with his Moscow counterpart, Sergei Prikhodko, who had enthused to him about the Obama-Medvedev Summit in Moscow. The Kremlin is "very optimistic about the 'reset'" and believes it will bear fruit because the atmosphere between Obama and Medvedev was "remarkably different" than between Bush and Medvedev. Sarybai said Prikhodko had called this a "source of real optimism."

18. (C) Sarybai also averred that Russia had blindsided Kazakhstan by announcing the establishment of a CSTO/Russian military base in Kyrgyzstan. The Ambassador responded this is hardly believable since Kazakhstan seems to be a member in good standing of the CSTO, and surely Moscow must have consulted with Astana in advance on this issue. Sarybai maintained there had been no prior consultation, and that

Nazarbayev had been furious and demanded an explanation from Medvedev. According to Sarybai, Medvedev told Nazarbayev not to worry, that this is simply a Russia-Kyrgyzstan bilateral agreement, and that Russia will only use the base to train Kyrgyz troops. The Ambassador asked, "Do you believe that?" Sarybai replied, "In public, we accept public explanations."

19. (C) COMMENT: It seems inconceivable that Russia would have acted in the name of the CSTO without ever having consulted with the other members. And so it is unclear if Sarybai was trying to spin us (which we've never seen him do before), or if, in fact, CIS relations are even more Byzantinely opaque than we had assumed. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND